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Report to / Rapport au:

**Ottawa Public Library Board
Conseil d'administration de la Bibliothèque publique d'Ottawa**

September 12, 2023 / 12 septembre 2023

Submitted by / Soumis par:

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SUBJECT: Board Governance Evaluation Report and Action Plan

**OBJET: Le plan d'action et rapport d'évaluation sur la gouvernance du
Conseil d'administration**

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Ottawa Public Library Board:

- 1. Receive the 2022 OPL Governance Evaluation Report for information, as described in the report; and,**
- 2. Approve the 2023-2024 OPL Governance Evaluation Action Plan, as described in the report.**

RECOMMANDATIONS DU RAPPORT

Que le Conseil d'administration de la Bibliothèque publique d'Ottawa :

- 1. Prenne connaissance du Rapport d'évaluation de la gouvernance 2022 de la BPO pour information, tel que décrit dans le rapport; et**

2. Adopte le Plan d'action d'évaluation de la gouvernance 2022-2023 de la BPO, tel que décrit dans le rapport.

BACKGROUND

As per Ottawa Public Library (“OPL” or “the Library”) Board (“the Board”) Policy 001, Roles and Responsibilities of the Board and Trustees, the Board’s role includes reviewing and approving major strategies, plans, and decisions.

The Board’s responsibility with respect to its own governance is further defined in Policy 15, Board Evaluations and Governance Reviews. Most recently revised and approved by the Board in November 2022, this policy includes a requirement for trustees to complete several self-evaluation questionnaires during each Board term: the Meeting Evaluation Form (Appendix A of the policy) is completed annually to assess the general structure and functioning of Board meetings, and the Performance Evaluation Form (Appendix B of the policy) is completed every second year, commonly in Years 2 and 4 of the term of Board, to assess the Board’s performance.

The Board establishes a Governance Ad hoc Committee (“the Committee”) to advise and support staff in the review of the questionnaire results and develop a Governance Action Plan (“the Plan”), normally produced in the first year of the term of Board and reviewed and revised as required during the mid-term governance update in the third year of the term. This Plan includes recommendations for both the Board and CEO to implement. The Committee also advises staff regarding other governance or strategic issues, including reviewing Board position statements and Board policies, and reviewing commemorative naming and Order of Friendship applications; however, it should be noted that the Plan is restricted to actions pertaining to Board performance, and does not include actions related to the full scope of the work of the Committee.

This report presents the initial findings from the Performance Evaluation Form results from the end of the 2019-2022 term of Board and outlines key recommendations for actions related to Board performance (2023-2024 OPL Governance Evaluation Action Plan) for the next 18 months, until the mid-term governance update in 2025.

DISCUSSION

The Performance Evaluation Form was distributed to trustees who served on the 2019-2022 Board in Q1 2023.

The Committee was subsequently established; membership was approved by the Board in February 2023, and is comprised of Trustees Jessica Bradley and Harvey Slack, with Chair Luloff as ex-officio. The Committee met in April and May 2023.

As in previous terms, staff and the Committee reviewed results prior to deciding whether to recommend engaging a consultant to assist with next steps. A consultant has been engaged in the past (most recently in 2021) to conduct trustee interviews and report on findings or provide advice regarding a holistic revision of Board policies. The Committee agreed that based on current questionnaire results, it is not necessary to engage a consultant at this point in the 2022-2026 Board governance review process.

2022 OPL Governance Evaluation Report

OPL Board trustees from the 2019-2022 term of Board were invited to complete the Performance Evaluation Form (Board Policy 015-OPLB - OPL Board Evaluations and Governance Reviews, Appendix B) between February and April of 2023. This questionnaire seeks trustees' perspectives on a broad range of Board performance dimensions reflecting governance best practices. This report is a combination of the views presented by trustees in their responses, as well as insights from staff and the members of the Governance Ad hoc Committee.

Given the nature of the process undertaken in this round of assessment (eliminating the in-person confidential interviews with a consultant), staff and members of the Ad hoc Committee also examined past trends in survey responses and comments to determine whether this year's modified process had other impacts on the responses received. The responses were found to align with previous governance reviews; however, there were fewer written comments than in previous questionnaire responses. This may be ascribed to the timing of this questionnaire, when trustees may feel that their comments on a Board that is ending its term are less relevant.

Key Findings: Strengths

Overall, questionnaire responses indicated that the Board is performing very well.

- 83% of respondents rated the Board as "very effective;"

- 31% of questions received one dissatisfied response;
- Only 4% of questions received more than one dissatisfied response. These may suggest some areas of weakness or areas in which greater trustee orientation or education is needed and are discussed in detail below.

Key Findings: Potential Areas of Concern

- The trustee orientation process: There was a wider spread in responses to the question “The orientation process for new trustees adequately prepares them to fulfill their responsibilities,” including several dissatisfied responses. Noting that trustees were answering this question in many cases four years after their orientation, and that two trustees joined the Board mid-term and mid-pandemic, staff and Committee members took these elements into consideration when considering the responses. Nevertheless, a single, day-long intensive in-person orientation session may not be most effective in the future. Similarly, some responses and comments pointed to a potential lack of clarity regarding the role of trustees in communicating and advocating on behalf of OPL, and less consensus around the trustee role in strategic partnerships.
- Succession planning: Several trustees expressed disagreement with the statement “The organization has an emergency contingency plan for the succession of the corporation’s Officers.” However, it is possible that recent changes in the senior management level were on the minds of trustees when responding. The corporation’s officers, in keeping with the *Public Libraries Act*, include a Chief Executive Officer (CEO), a Secretary, and a Treasurer. Succession planning for these roles was recently updated in a revision to Board Policy 009, Roles and Responsibilities of the CEO, which delegated the responsibilities of Secretary and Treasurer by building them into the job descriptions of Manager, Board and Strategic Services and Division Manager, Corporate Services, respectively. It is possible that several trustees were responding considering the former CEO’s recent retirement, and / or recent leaves and retirements among division managers (not all of whom are officers).
- Relationship-building with community partners: Several trustees disagreed with the statement that “The Board has identified its key stakeholders or stakeholder groups and has defined communication strategies for each.” At the end of the previous term of Board, in November 2022, Policy 009, Roles and

Responsibilities of the CEO was revised to include “Develop and maintain relationships with community stakeholders and leaders to promote library services. Key community groups may include official partners, community associations, library industry organizations, municipal departments or organizations, and politicians at the municipal, provincial, and federal level” under CEO responsibilities. It is recommended that the Board continue to monitor relationships of strategic importance via the CEO performance review process, and that staff undertake further continuing education activities related to updating trustees regarding key operational relationships and the Board’s role in representing OPL or advocating on its behalf.

2023-2026 Governance Action Plan

Based on a review of the questionnaire results, the below Plan is endorsed by staff and the Governance Ad hoc Committee.

Recommendation 1: Review the Trustee orientation process

OPL normally receives confirmation of trustees' names approximately five days before the first Board meeting; the first meeting includes tabling the annual budget. Traditionally, trustee orientation takes the format of a one-day (7 hour) in-person group orientation session. While there is tremendous benefit in gathering to build a sense of teamwork and collegiality among new Board members, using this format alone may not be the most effective or efficient use of trustees’ time, may not be suited to all learning preferences, and may not take advantage of innovations in training formats in recent years. The content of trustee orientation focuses on all elements of the organization, keeping in mind the content of the first meeting of the new Board.

A review of the orientation process is recommended well before planning begins for the 2027-2030 term of Board. Staff have developed a questionnaire for current trustees, to assess the recent January 2023 orientation while it is relatively fresh in their memory. Results will be reviewed with the Committee, and the discussion should also explore opportunities for different formats for different modules in the orientation package, recognizing that gathering trustees at the beginning of a new term together in-person is a valuable experience that must also be retained.

Recommendation 2: Review the trustee continuing education process

Related to Recommendation 1, there are also opportunities to improve the continuing education process for trustees, integrating topics identified in questionnaire responses into educational sessions at Board meetings, field opportunities (noting these were less frequent or fulfilling during pandemic when they primarily occurred virtually), or annual Board workshops, informed by staff input, and prioritized in consultation with the Committee. The 2023 workshop centered around a discussion of the OPL Strategic Plan.

Recommendation 3: Review Board Policy 003, Trustee Orientation and Continuing Education, and other policies as required, to support Recommendations 1 and 2, as necessary.

Based on trustee feedback regarding Recommendations 1 and 2, as practicable during this term, staff will review and revise Policy 3 to align with new practices as required. Staff will also review all Board policies as part of the regular work of the Governance Ad hoc Committee each term and revise as required (such as anticipated revisions to the appendices in Policy 15, Board Evaluations and Governance Reviews, for example to define the Board's officers for greater clarity).

CONSULTATION

Library staff worked with the OPL Board Governance Ad hoc Committee to review and better understand the Q1 2023 questionnaire results and provide recommendations for the Governance Action Plan.

ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS

Ottawa Public Library complies with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, (2005)* in its operations. There are no accessibility impacts associated with this report.

BOARD PRIORITIES

This report aligns with the OPL value of integrity (“We embody the principles of public stewardship, transparency, and accountability in our operations and interactions.”). This report is prepared in compliance with OPL Board Policy 015-OPLB - Board Evaluations and Governance Review.

BUSINESS ANALYSIS IMPLICATIONS

The recommendations in this report were developed from the results of the self-evaluations completed by OPL trustees. This survey was administered online using Microsoft (MS) Forms; previous versions of the survey were completed using CheckMarket or paper forms. At this time, staff anticipate that future surveys will be completed online using MS Forms.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with this report. Should external professional consulting services be subsequently engaged to support the Plan, funding for these services is available in the existing annual operating budget.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal impediments to approving the recommendations in this report.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Implementing the Governance Evaluation Action Plan may assist in more effective risk management processes at OPL: better understanding of trustee roles and responsibilities, and of OPL as an organization, will also support informed and evidence-based decision-making.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS

There are no technology implications related to this report.

DISPOSITION

Upon approval of this report, the Manager, Board & Strategic Services will lead the implementation of the 2023-2024 OPL Governance Evaluation Action Plan.